



NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE

Bethesda, Maryland

A D D R E S S, &c.

AFTER a continued struggle of many centuries against the absurd systems of ancient physicians, and amid the difficulties repeatedly opposed to the progress of Medicine by modern hypotheses scarcely less preposterous, it has at length become established as a fundamental truth, that experiment must precede conjecture, and that facts are the only rational basis of theory. Philosophers are no longer permitted to descend from generals to particulars, shaping them according to preconceived notions of their intimate relations; but are expected to proceed by a rigid examination and cautious assemblage of particulars to every general inference. This laborious process of reasoning, so favourable to truth, and so little flattering to indolence, to vanity, and to a creative fancy, requires the possession of an extensive mass of experiment, a various and judicious selection of facts;—not only for him who would overthrow or construct a system, but for every one who would rightly exercise the art to which they belong. And in proportion as these sentiments have gained ground among physicians, Systems of Physic have lost much of their value; and Collections of Histories and Observations, whether the work of a single, or of many hands, have gradually obtained a high consideration and authority in the schools of medicine, as well as in the closets of practitioners. For, whatever advantages may have been temporarily derived from certain celebrated theories, it is chiefly by the new spring which they have given to the mind, and by the more accurate investigation of natural phenomena to which they have incited others, that they have been permanently useful. For our knowledge of nature is too limited, our collection of materials too scanty, to enable even the most diligent and ingenious to frame a correct theory.

Medical

Medical collections, therefore, are still necessary, and must long continue to be so; and as they are free from the incumbrance of systematized hypothesis, the opinions they contain, for the most part, spring more naturally out of the facts on which they are founded, are thus less likely to mislead, and even though erroneous, as they maintain no intimate connection with an extensive scheme, still leave us, in the facts themselves, the surest guides amidst the intricacies of practice. Publications of this kind, likewise, from their very nature, possess many advantages over systematic works. They employ a greater number of observers, over a wider field, admit of minuter details, ampler discussions, and more various opinions and recondite investigations. By their instrumentality, facts are preserved or rescued from oblivion, which, without them, had been wholly lost: for there are few men who find leisure and inclination, from the pressure of daily business, to become authors, and still fewer whose observations are so numerous and important as to demand a laboured treatise; while there are many who have time and facts to furnish out, almost every year of their lives, a short but valuable essay. And if to these arguments, in favour of Medical Collections, drawn from the nature of the works, it may be permitted to add others from the practice of other nations than our own, the example of almost every civilized country of Europe may be cited; in which publications of this kind are successfully multiplied, and sought after with peculiar avidity. But, notwithstanding the many obvious benefits resulting from them, such undertakings, in the United States, have been few, and feebly prosecuted. And this is the more to be lamented, as no country in the world is so capable of giving permanent utility to such a design. For, beside those advantages which we possess in common with other nations, there are numerous others of new and peculiar importance. These exist in our extensive territory; in the variety of its soil, climate, elevation, and aspect; in the varied descent, population, intermixture, institutions, manners, and consequent diseases, of its inhabitants; in the opportunities it affords of observing and estimating the effects of old and new settlements, of gradual and rapid changes in the face of a country, of agriculture, commerce, and navigation, of the savage, civilized, and intermediate states of society; of comparing the diseases, or phenomena of each disease, and the operation

tion of the same remedies, in the same or different complaints, in Europe and America; in the general diffusion of knowledge, and turn for observation, among all classes of its citizens; and, finally, in the sameness and perfection of their language—an advantage possessed in the same degree by no other people.—These are privileges which should prove so many powerful incentives to medical industry; which should inspire the exertions of physicians to give that importance, in a professional view, to their country, which, fertile as she is in occasions, she loudly calls for at their hands.

The present time seems particularly favourable to such attempts. The distressing events which have been so recently witnessed, in various parts of our country, have awakened the curiosity of others, as well as of physicians; and while they have quickened the zeal and observation of the latter, have excited the eager apprehensions of all. This has created an uncommon interest, in respect to medical opinions, among the people at large, and especially since the belief of the domestic origin of certain diseases has been considerably diffused. The partial success of a late benevolent attempt, of the kind now referred to,* is rather encouraging than disheartening; since its failure is attributable to causes not necessarily connected with the design, and since there is good ground to believe, that a little perseverance would have given it stability and reputation.—To the success of such a publication, much time, as well as the concurrent exertions of many observers, were indispensable. The field of inquiry, likewise, was comparatively narrow; and too much reliance was, probably, placed on public solicitation, with so limited a time for the collection of materials.

Influenced by considerations, and invited by views, which we have now unfolded, and shall consequently enlarge upon, we have ventured to project a work such as we have recommended, and thus publicly to solicit your assistance in its execution. And we request you to furnish us, either quarterly, semi-annually, or annually, as may best suit with your convenience, with such information, relative to all or either of the following particulars, as may be in your power.

I. Histories

* Mr. WEBSTER's Collection, relative to Billious Fevers, &c.

1. Histories of such diseases as reign in your particular places of residence, at each and every season of the year; including the time of their appearance and disappearance; the peculiar customs and manners, and food of the people; local peculiarities, (not merely those of the town or village, but of the immediate residence of the sick); preceding, cotemporary, and subsequent complaints; symptoms, progress, extent, method of cure, mortality, and what proportion of either sex, and of different ages, are affected:—in sea-ports, attention to be paid to supposed sources of importation, and to the arrival of foreigners; in new settlements, to changes in the face of the country, by clearings, drainings, &c. and to the increase of population, by immigration and otherwise.
2. Histories of such diseases as appear among *Domestic Animals*—such as horses, cattle, sheep, &c—their causes, symptoms, method of cure, &c. &c.
3. Accounts of *Insects*—whether any uncommon dearth or numbers of them; whether troublesome or noxious to men, beasts, or vegetables; with as accurate and minute notices as may be of their derivation, mode of propagation, nature and extent of such ravages, or other evils, as they may occasion; of their appearance and disappearance, and of the means, if any, of guarding against or destroying them.
4. Histories of the progress and condition of *Vegetation*—with regard to growth, vigour, and disease; independent of the ravages of insects; but marking the influence of manures, and the local situation, both as to elevation and soil, air and water.
5. The state of the *Atmosphere*—in respect to dryness and humidity, heat and cold, serenity and tempestuousness; including the direction and force of winds, and the sensible quantity of electricity.

Where information relative to these various topics of inquiry can be given in a connected form, it will be most acceptable; and the more minute and precise, the more useful will it be. But general and distinct communications are earnestly

neftly requested, where more extensive and combined intelligence cannot readily be afforded.

The outline now traced, gentlemen, will enable you to form fome idea of the nature, extent, and importance of the work, in the profecution of which we follicit your co-operation. The benefits which may refult from fuch a publication, if vigorously and judiciously executed, are too numerous and confiderable not to be fuggested by the flighteft reflection. Were it to be ably and completely profecuted, it could fcarcely fail, even in a few years, of leading us to a near view of the origin and caufes of general, or febrile difeafes; to the difcovery of what fituations, climates, and feafons, moft favoured their production; of the order, and rapidity of their progreflion, from one place to another, in the fame or different countries; and of the moft fuccefsful method of cure, as well as of prevention. Aided by a work compofed of materials collected with fuch care, and drawn from fo many and fo diftant quarters, we might be enabled to determine the relative healthinefs of places; the caufes why fome were favourable and fome unfavourable to health; their peculiar difeafes, with the means of their removal and extirpation.—No plan feems more happily calculated to mark and explain the influence of different ftates of fociety, occupations, institutions, manners, expofure, air, modes of living, &c. &c. on health; and thus, indirectly, on morals, induftry, and happinefs: none more happily, for refolving the hitherto unexplained and difficult problem, propofed by the illuftrious Sydenham,*—“ whether a careful examination might *not* fhew, that certain tribes of diforders “ constantly follow others, in one determinate feries, or circle, “ as it were; or whether they all return, indifcriminately, according to the fecret difpofition of the air, and the inexplicable fucceffion of the feafons.” Nor is the folution of this problem of fmall importance; fince, in the firft place, were it difcovered that general difeafes purfued a regular courfe, we might thence be prepared to receive and counteract them; or, were it determined that they depended on the qualities of the atmofphere, we fhould be directed to the proper object of investigation, and thus be well advanced towards a knowledge of their caufes. But, whatever may be true in refpect to the
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* WALLIS'S Sydenham, vol. i. p. 6.

systematic succession of diseases, hinted at by Sydenham, it is certain that an apparent progress of a particular disease has sometimes been observable in the United States; as though the morbid principle possessed the power of assimilating the atmosphere to its own nature, agreeable to determinate, but inscrutable and peculiar laws: sometimes rapidly extending, as in the *Influenza*; sometimes slowly, as in *Scarlatina*. It is perhaps difficult rightly to appreciate the benefits which the determining of a single point like this would confer on medicine; (whether by quieting apprehensions of such an extension of a disease, if indeed there were no reason to fear it; or by putting us on our guard, if such were clearly proved to be its nature)—but, whatever they may be, no method seems better adapted for ascertaining the fact, than by a publication like the one now proposed. By this means, the inquirer will be presented with a regular history of the progress of such a disease, from one extremity of the continent to the other; and be able to mark its effects in all the varieties of people, climate, and season; or, if it appear in several places, obviously disconnected, at the same time, of comparing the circumstances in which they resemble each other, and thus of determining its causes.—But, not to dwell longer on the recommendations to such a work, we may ultimately remark, that, when thus completed, the volume of every year will form the history of the health of the United States for the year preceding; a single glance of the eye will be equal to perceive what diseases prevailed at the same time, in all the intermediate situations, from St. Mary's to St. Croix, and from the Mississippi to the Atlantic; and individual experience, as well as new discoveries, will be propagated with unexampled benefit and celerity, to every part of the United States.

When we consider the extensive plan now proposed, the number of persons, and the time required for its execution, and the difficulties which always attend every work of the kind, we should indulge a presumptuous and reprehensible expectation, did we look to see it speedily and completely carried into effect. But, notwithstanding all reasonable allowance for impediments of this sort, we flatter ourselves that such materials may be collected from time to time, as will enable us to present annually an acceptable volume to the public; while the
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great object of our proposed inquiries, as already explained, will gradually acquire consistence and patronage.

To the end that such a volume may be readily and regularly published, we have thought it advisable to add the following subjects, to those heretofore proposed, concerning all of which we would request information.

1. Accurate and succinct accounts of general diseases which have formerly prevailed in any part of the United States.
2. Useful histories of particular Cases.
3. Histories of such complaints of professional men, mechanics, manufacturers, &c. as appear to originate from their peculiar employments, or the materials with, or about which they are employed.
4. New methods of curing diseases.
5. Accounts of new discovered or applied remedies, in rare or hitherto incurable diseases.
6. Extracts from rare, printed or manuscript, works, illustrative of the nature and cure of such diseases as now prevail in the United States.
7. Interesting information, relative to the minerals, plants, and animals of America.
8. American medical biography.
9. Accounts of former American medical publications.
10. Reviews of new American medical publications.
11. Medical news.

It will be obvious to every one, that the variety of subjects comprehended in this undertaking, will put it in the power of almost every other class of citizens, as well as of physicians, usefully to aid in its execution: and as the benefits which may result from its success are limited to no description of men, we are the more encouraged to solicit assistance from all whose situations enable them to afford it. We address ourselves, therefore, not to physicians only, but to men of observation, and to the learned, throughout the United States.

With

With respect to the mode of publication, we have not yet decided, whether to print an octavo volume annually, or to distribute the same materials into four quarterly numbers, equal to such a volume. This must be determined, in good measure, by the regularity and readiness with which we are supplied with suitable materials; and by those superior advantages for circulation, which, after proper inquiry, one form shall appear to possess over the other. But, whichever may be preferred, seasonable notice will be given, and a subscription will be opened to defray the expence, when we are ready for publication; and, in the mean time, it is desired that all communications may be addressed to

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